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Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
---------- 024000
P 151505Z JUL 76
FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1714

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 2930

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINT, JM
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION MAY NOT CONTEXT ELECTION

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY - OPPOSITION LEADER EDWARD SEAGA CALLED ON ME AT HIS REQUEST EVEING JULY 12 ACCOMPANIED BY OPPOSITION LEADER IN THE SENATE, DR. RONALD IRVINE. MY POLOFF WAS PRESENT. SEAGA'S MESSAGE WAS ONE OF DESPAIR. THE DETENTION OF SOME OF HIS KEY SUPPORTERS UNDER THE SATE OF EMERGENCY (SOE) REGULATIONS, AND THE FEAR OF OTHERS THAT THEY MIGHT SOON BE ARRESTED WAS SHATTERING JLP MORALE. SEAGA IS CONVINCED THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE JLP TO SUCCESSFULLY CONTEXT AN ELECTION UNDER THE SOE AND WILL BE CALLING A PARTY CONFERENCE ON JULY 25 TO DECIDE WHETHER TO MAKE SUCH A DECISION AND ANNOUNCE IT TO THE PUBLIC. END SUMMARY.

2. SEAGA CLAIMS THAT EVENTS ARE MOVING AT A PACE THAT IS OUT-STRIPPING HIS ABILITY TO KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST INTRIGUES OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THAT THE "OPPOSITION IS ON THE VERGE OF A DRAMATIC COLLAPSE". HE RELATED THAT HE HAD PLANNED TO RESUME CAMPAIGNING IN MANCHESTER AND ST. ELIZABETH ON JULY 14 BUT CANNOT SEE HOW HE CAN SUCCESS-FULLY CARRY IT OFF. THE POLICE HAVE LIMITED THE NUMBER OF VEHICLES HE CAN USE, HAVE NOT YET GRANTED PERMITS FOR HIS PLANNED MEETINGS AND IN THE CASE OF THE NORTHEAST ST. ELIZABETH CONSTITUENCY HAD JUST DETAINED THE JLP CANDIDATE, A MR. J.C. HUTCHINSON.

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3. SEAGE SAID "WE'RE AT SEA, WE FRANKLY DON'T KNOW WHAT

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IS HAPPENING". HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE CUBANS ARE PRO-
VIDING CONSIDERABLE ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE TO THE PRIME
MINISTER IN HIS EFFORT TO CRUSH THE OPPOSITION. HE SIMPLY
CANNOT SEE ANY CHANCE OF SUCCESS FOR THE JLP IN A GENERAL
ELECTION HELD UNDER SOE CONDITIONS. HE CLAIMED TO HAVE
INFORMATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT PLANNED TO INSTITUTE GAS
RATIONING AND ESTABLISH AN EXIT PERMIT CONTROL SYSTEM
WHEREBY JAMAICAN CITIZENS COULD ONLY APPROACH EMBASSIES
FOR VISAS AFTER THEY HAD RECEIVED PERMISSION FROM THE
GOVERNMENT TO TRAVEL. THESE TWO ACTIONS HE FELT WOULD
PROVIDE POWERFUL TOOLS TO INTIMIDATE JLP SUPPORTERS.
"THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT HAVE TO FIRE ONE SHOT TO
CRUSH THE OPPOSITION AND ACHIEVE TOTAL CONTROL; IT
CAN BE ACHIEVED SOLELY THROUGH INTIMIDATION".

4. JLP MORALE IS AT AN ALL-TIME LOW. SEAGA SEES HIS
ORGANIZATION CRUMBLING AROUND HIM. A DECISION WILL
HAVE TO BE MADE WITHIN THE MONTH WHETHER TO CONTEST
THE GENERAL ELECTION WHICH SEAGE BELIEVES WILL BE
CALLED IN EARLY SEPTEMBER; THE QUESTION WILL BE
ADDRESSED AT AN EXTRAORDINARY PARTY CONFERENCE THAT
WILL BE HELD ON JULY 25. ASKED WHAT HE THOUGHT PUBLIC
REACTION WOULD BE TO A JLP DECISION NOT TO CONTEST THE
ELECTION, SEAGA REPLIED MASSIVE PANIC IMMIGRATION.

5. I ASKED SEAGA WHETHER THERE WAS ANY TRUTH TO THE
RUMORS THAT HE WILL STEP DOWN AS LEADER OF THE PARTY
AND THAT HUGH SHEARER WOULD TAKE OVER. HE REPLIED
THAT HE HAD ASKED SHEARER TO TAKE OVER AND THAT HE HAD
REFUSED, ADDING HOWEVER THAT THERE MAY BE "TRUTH IN
THE RUMOR I WILL STEP DOWN". NO ONE OF STATURE WAS
EAGER TO TAKE OVER THE LEADERSHIP AND THE ONE THING
THAT MADE HIM HOLD ON WAS HIS SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY
FOR, AND OBLIGATION TO HIS SUPPORTERS AND CLOSE
FRIENDS WHO ARE NOW UNDER DETENTION.

6. ASKED WHETHER THE RECENT SUMMONSES ISSUED TO
FORMER PNP MINISTER ALLAN ISAACS AND HIS PERMANENT
SECRETARY HARDY-HENRY OVER THE ALLEGED LEAKING TO SEAGE
LAST DECEMBER OF THE CABINET PAPER ON THE ECONOMY WAS
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A FIRST STEP TO ARRESTING OR DETAINING HIM, SEAGA
SCOFFED THAT ALL THE GOVERNMENT WAS TRYING TO DO WAS
FRIGHTEN ISAACS INTO DESISTING FROM MAKING ANTI-PNP
PUBLIC REMARKS AND DISSUADE HARDY-HENRY FROM FOLLOWING
THROUGH ON A SUIT HE PLANNED TO FILE AGAINST THE GOVERN-
MENT. SEAGA BELIEVES THERE WILL BE "ONE BIG UGLY MESS"
IF HE IS DETAINED, BUT DENIED THE THREAT OF A VIOLENT
REACTION BY HIS SUPPORTERS WITH THE COMMENT "THEIR BACKS

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ARE AGAINST THE WALL; THEY ARE TOO AFRAID TO DO ANYTHING".

7. ON THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, SEAGA SAID IT WAS MISERABLE AND GETTING WORSE DAILY. GOVERNMENT'S FAILURES WILL NOW BE SCREENED BY ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE PRIVATE SECTOR OF ECONOMIC SABOTAGE. THE MUCH HERALDED 5-YEAR SUGAR DEAL WITH IRAN HAS FALLEN THROUGH. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE TOKE, FACE-SAVING FINAL SHIPMENT NO MORE SUGAR WILL BE SENT TO IRAN. THE IRANIANS ARE GOING TO TENDER FOR THEIR SUGAR NEEDS AND IT LOOKS LIKE INDIA WILL BE THE LOW PRICE BIDDER.

8. I ASKED SEAGA IF HE THOUGHT THE PERILOUS STATE OF THE ECONOMY AND DEARTH OF FX WOULD FORCE THE GOVERNMENT TO SQUEEZE THE BAUXITE/ALUMINA INDUSTRY EVEN MORE. AN EMPHATIC "NO" WAS HIS ANSWER. "EVEN THE HUNGARIANS HAVE ADVISED THEM THAT THE BAUXITE LEVY IS TOO HIGH".

9. COMMENT: SEAGA CLEARLY WAS IN A DESPONDENT MOOD WHEN WE TALKED. WHILE THE JLP IS OPERATING AT A TREMENDOUS DISADVANTAGE UNDER THE SOE, THE SITUATION MAY NOT BE AS DIRE AS HE MAKES IT OUT TO BE.

10. SHOULD SEAGA THROW IN THE TOWEL AND THE JLP DECIDE NOT TO CONTEST THE ELECTION, WE COULD EXPECT THE OPPOSITION TO ATROPHY, AND COULD COUNT ON AT LEAST ANOTHER 5 YEARS OF MANLEY RULE. SEAGA PROBABLY IS RIGHT ABOUT THE MIGRATION OF JAMAICANS. MANY OF THEM HAVE HELD OUT HOPING MANLEY WOULD BE VOTED OUT OF OFFICE. IF THERE WERE TO BE NO CONTESTED ELECTION, ONE COULD EXPECT THEM TO START MOVING RIGHT AWAY.

11. A MANLEY GOVERNMENT RETURNED UNOPPOSED FOR ANOTHER
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5 YEARS WOULD BE MORE RADICAL ONE, WITH FEW CONSTRAINTS UPON IT. IT WOULD NOT BE A MORE SELF-CONFIDENT OR EFFECTIVE ONE, HOWEVER, AND WE COULD EXPECT A CONTINUED PREOCCUPATION WITH FOREIGN BOGEYMEN OF THE CAPITALIST VARIETY.
GERARD

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